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ABSTRACT

Three frontier newspapers in Michigan for the period July 1849 to July 1850 were analyzed to determine how women were depicted in the press of that time. The research concentrated on coverage in six areas: courtship and marriage; the role of women as wives and mothers; women depicted in literature; famous women; women's rights in the home, on the job, and in politics; and humor and ridicule directed at women. The findings revealed that (1) women's role in courtship and marriage was extremely well-covered in the frontier press; (2) women were depicted as hard working wives and mothers; (3) women depicted in fiction were representative of prevailing attitudes of the culture, with the heroine willing to sacrifice everything for her country and family; (4) famous women did merit some coverage in the press, but only a fraction of that given to notable men; (5) far from ridiculing women's rights, the newspapers praised those seeking to extend these rights; and (6) most of the humor directed toward women concerned their dress or ridiculed their allegedly talkative nature. (FL)

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HOW THREE FRONTIER NEWSPAPERS IN MICHIGAN DEPICTED WOMEN

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HOW THREE FRONTIER NEWSPAPERS IN MICHIGAN DEPICTED WOMEN

INTRODUCTION

The small weekly newspapers of the booming frontier towns of the mid-1800s provided a valuable service to their readers. Such publications served as recorders and historians for their communities. The residents of the frontier depended on the newspaper as the primary means of communication. In addition, the press served as the conscience and watchdog of the community.

By the 1840s many Michigan communities had two newspapers. The two major political parties, the Whigs and the Democrats, each supported newspapers throughout the state. Even in communities where a second newspaper was not feasible, the opposition party would have a temporary organ.[1]

The frontier newspapers in Michigan can tell about the morals and habits of the 1840s and the 1850s as well as the political events of the time. By studying how women were depicted in the press of that era, life on the frontier can be better understood. This paper will examine three frontier newspapers from Michigan for a one-year period, July 1849-July 1850. This period was chosen for several reasons: (a) it is after the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848; (b) the time frame chosen is well into the frontier era yet it is before the Civil War, and (c) to start much earlier in the frontier era would limit the choice of newspapers to study because many frontier papers in Michigan did not begin publication until the 1840s.

The three newspapers that will be examined in this paper

are the Grand Rapids Enquirer, the Marshall Statesman, and the Hillsdale Whig Standard. These newspapers were chosen for several reasons. First, each publication is representative of the many frontier newspapers being printed in Michigan at that time. Each of these newspapers was an excellent example of a successful frontier newspaper in a growing Michigan settlement. By 1850, all three newspapers were firmly established and publishing weekly.

These papers were also chosen because they were located in the frontier areas of Michigan. Although there were several papers publishing in Detroit, this area did not fit the description of a frontier in 1850. By then, Detroit had been settled for decades and no longer exhibited frontier characteristics. Towns like Grand Rapids, Marshall and Hillsdale were located in areas that were newly settled. As these towns were on the frontier, their newspapers will better reflect the lives of the new settlers than the Detroit publications.

The Enquirer, the Statesman and the Standard also provide a contrast between Democratic and Whig newspapers. The Enquirer followed a Democratic platform, while the Statesman and Standard were Whig papers. This paper will examine if there was any difference in these newspapers coverage of women because of their political persuasion.

By using these three publications, this paper shall examine how the Michigan frontier press depicted women in 1849-1850. The research will be divided into six sections: (1) courtship and

marriage, (2) the role of wife and mother, (3) women in literature, (4) famous women, (5) women's rights, and (6) the humor directed at women.

It is hypothesized that the frontier press will extensively cover the women's role in courtship and marriage. Women will probably be depicted as hard working wives and mothers. The literature in the frontier press should reinforce the conception of what a frontier wife and mother should be. Famous women will be given some limited coverage, but only a fraction of what the famous men of the time were given. Women's rights will either be ignored or ridiculed. Finally, there will be much humor directed at women in the frontier press.

Before examining how women were depicted in the frontier press, this paper shall provide a brief look at the population and the newspapers of the Michigan frontier, and background information about the three newspapers used in this study.

Life on the Michigan Frontier

The population of Michigan increased greatly in the decades preceding 1850. In 1820, Michigan's population was only 8,000. This figure climbed to 31,639 in 1830 and 212,267 in 1840. By 1850, the population had swelled to 395,071.[2]

In the 1840s, Michigan enjoyed the immigration of more than 174,000 people from New England, New York, and Pennsylvania.[3] Settlers came into Michigan by wagon, ferries, steamboats, and railroads.[4]

The census of 1850 shows that 98 percent of the state's population lived in the southern counties of the lower peninsula, about one-quarter of the state's total area.[5]

The new settlers in Michigan were not "adventurers or shiftless cattle grazers." Most were small, middle-class farmers and merchants who believed in thrift and order, and had a fondness for village life.[6] Several home lots in each town were occupied by business, professional and retired people. This made many Michigan towns reminiscent of the agricultural villages in early New England.[7]

Beard said that many Northerners went to the frontier to secure land for free labor. The pioneers went with spirit to the wilderness. Handicrafts were nurtured, artistic work was done, learning was cherished and refinements were purchased at immense personal cost.[8] People occupying the farms were closely knit, non-demonstrative and taciturn people. The attachments of blood relationships were strong and there was strict observance of the Sabbath.[9]

Yet, within the home there was affection. Kniffen describes it as "restrained warmth." Frontier families did have some fun after the long days of chores. Games like checkers and cat's cradle were played and folk music filled the air. Stories were told about Sile Doty, the Robin Hood of southeastern Michigan. In their isolation, frontier families had limited knowledge of the outside world. Travelers and newspapers provided news to the frontier. The frontier newspapers did carry some world news, but they never forgot to include local news because people were always interested in community events.[10]

Background on the Enquirer, Statesman, and Standard

The growth of newspapers in Michigan during the frontier era paralleled the swift increase in population. In 1828, Michigan had only two newspapers. The number grew to 32 by 1840.[11] In 1850, there were 58 publications in Michigan. The newspapers consisted of 47 weeklies and a handful of publications printed daily, tri-weekly, semi-monthly and monthly.[12] All three newspapers examined in this study were weeklies.

The Grand Rapids Enquirer began publication on May 18, 1841 with James H. Morse and Company as the first publishers. Although it began non-partisan it soon became Democratic. Jacob Barns, a Vermont native who came to Michigan in 1836 to learn the printer's trade, became publisher of the Enquirer on June 5, 1846.[13] Barns was connected for many years with both the Enquirer and the Detroit Free Press before his death in 1883.[14]

Thomas B. Church, a prominent Grand Rapids lawyer and journalist, was the editor of the Enquirer from 1848 to 1851.[15] Both Barns and Church were active in the Democratic party and their political preference helped the Enquirer develop into a partisan publication. In early 1850, the Enquirer said that Church had been chosen as a delegate to the state constitutional convention. Barns was the secretary of the Democratic district committee which chose Church as a delegate.[16] Church went on to be a member of the State House from 1851-1856.[17]

The Enquirer was a four-page, six-column publication printed every Wednesday. Page one generally had historical articles and literature. Letters and editorials usually appeared on page two. Pages three and four were composed mostly of advertisements with some filler material.

The Marshall Statesman first appeared as the Western Statesman on September 12, 1839. On October 12, 1841 it became the Marshall Statesman. Seth Lewis was the publisher of the paper from its first edition until January 1866.[18] James Pratt served as editor of the newspaper until he left to hunt for gold in California in 1849.[19] He was succeeded by George Pratt on February 3, 1850.[20] James Pratt continued to write articles for the Statesman during his journey west. Many of his letters vividly describing his exploits in California were printed in the Statesman.

The Statesman was a four-page, six-column newspaper. It did not run advertisements on the front page, and its literature, history, and editorial content was distributed in the same way as the Enquirer. The philosophy of the Statesman was explained on February 13, 1850, when the paper pledged to be a "good family newspaper with a healthy moral influence." It further promised to be an "able and consistent helper in the cause of reform, advocating the sound, republican doctrines of the Whig Party."[21]

The Hillsdale Whig Standard was the youngest of the three newspapers examined. The Standard was first published on June 30, 1846. The Standard pledged to print "good Whig doctrine." The

newspaper was published every Tuesday morning at Underwood's Block Third Story Office. S.D. Clark and H.B. Rowlson served as its editors.[22]

The Standard was also a four-page paper but its copy was divided into seven columns. On the front page advertising was limited to the top left-hand corner. Most advertisements ran on page three and four. The literature, history, and editorial content was placed in the same fashion as in the Enquirer and the Statesman, with history and literature on the first page and editorial comment on page two.

As in most frontier newspapers, much of the news was reprinted from other publications that made their way to the area. Letters were another large source of news. Any subscriber who could read or write usually contributed an article at one time or another.[23]

HOW WOMEN WERE DEPICTED IN THE FRONTIER PRESS

I. Courtship and Marriage

The Michigan frontier press frequently discussed the women's role in courtship and marriage. Seldom did a newspaper fail to include some article or story about relationships between the sexes.

When viewing the treatment of courtship and marriage by the frontier press it is important not to impose present day standards on past events. Although some statements might seem deplorable by today's standards, values and morals were quite different on the Michigan frontier of 1850.

The Marshall Statesman said that "young ladies are bound to fall in love as soon as possible, and bound to be bound to a partner for life after the necessary preliminaries." The six steps toward marriage were getting a lover, fascinating him thoroughly, being courted, having the question popped, getting wedding garments in array, and inviting friends to see them married.[24]

Women were shown as eager to snag a husband. The Statesman said that "young ladies pick up husbands at Coney Island by venturing into the surf and coming near getting drowned. Their deliverers become their wooers."[25]

The Enquirer reprinted an article from the Boston Post entitled "Manifest Destiny." In this article, a Dr. Liebeg said that women were born to be married. Liebeg said "men are born to die, too--but when you...talk of the preparation for the event, they are as little fitted for it as the girls for the future state of matrimony."[26] The Statesman said that women were often ignorant before their marriage.[27] The Standard said that the "woman does not marry the man, the man marries her." Using quotes from the Bible, one article said that the wife "agrees to love, honor and obey, which are only promises contingent on the good conduct of the husband."[28]

Many articles appeared telling men how to "get a wife." The Statesman said that some men conquered women by gold, some by intellect, and still others captivated the fair sex by their beauty and accomplishments. The piece concluded that "getting a wife is a very serious business."[29]

Men were frequently warned about how to choose a spouse. They were told to find a woman that could play and sing, dance the polka and entertain company.[30] The Standard suggested that if a man was courting a young lady he should try her temper by tearing her dress as if by accident. If the girl kept her equanimity, the man should "loose not a moment in popping the question."[31] The Enquirer said that the seven requisites of a good wife were piety, sense, temper, education, manners, beauty, and riches.[32]

The man was told he would suffer if he did not exercise caution in getting married. "Nobody can feel more truly wretched than on the happiest day of his life," said the Standard. "A wedding is even more melancholy than a funeral."[33] The Standard warned that "to dream of a millstone about your neck is a sign of what you may expect if you marry an extravagent wife."[34]

The Standard advised men that good looks were not enough. In "A Coquette's Account of Herself," the Standard told of a bewitching girl with a sweet figure, charming teeth and fine eyes who calculated to break a husband's heart.[35] Good looks were also seen as something that would soon fade away. The Standard said:

> A young man meets a pretty face in the ball-room, falls in love with it, "marries," goes to housekeeping with it, and boasts of having a home to go to, and a wife. The chances are 9 in 10 he has neither...Her pretty face gets to be an old story...[36]

Women were also warned about getting married too quickly. The Statesman said that "marriage is the great event in woman's life, from which all other events take their coloring. If she

err here, her whole life is one of unavailing penance." The Statesman said that a proper suitor would not get married without the permission of the bride's parents.[37] Women were cautioned not to marry any man who talked loudly, squeezed her hand, or ate heartily in her prescence.[38]

II. Duties as Wife and Mother

Once they had courted and married, a husband and wife each had duties they were expected to perform. The frontier press depicted both men and women as hard working people willing to do almost anything for their families. Anyone who neglected their duties was harshly criticized.

The Statesman said that the happy girl was known by her fresh looks, buoyant spirits, and willingness to work. Day in and day out the good wife "has something to do and she takes hold of work as if she did not fear to soil her hands or dirty her apron," the Statesman said.[39]

The Standard reminded readers that there should be equality in a marriage. If a married man considered it justifiable to spend an evening away from home, the Standard said, it was equally fair for the woman to go out and visit her friends.[40]

The duties of the frontier wife were cited repeatedly in the Michigan frontier press. The frontier wife had to work hard because it was a matter of survival. Sochen said there was a critical shortage of labor in the newly settled frontier areas and women were often required to help their husbands with the numerous physical tasks on the farm.[41]

It was a serious offense for a frontier woman to be lazy. Kniffen said the work ethic was exceedingly strong. There was even competition to outdo one another in feats of labor.[42] This competition for recognition was reflected in the press.

The Enquirer, the Standard and the Statesman all published many stories about the amazing abilities of frontier wives. In an article reprinted from the Detroit Advertiser, the Enquirer said a Mrs. Charles Taylor from Chicago had sewed a quilt composed of 9,800 pieces of silk, each an inch square, for her mother, Mrs. A. Wilcox of Detroit.[43] The Standard told of a 35-year-old woman who had to raise five children by herself when her husband left for California. This particular frontier wife wove 700 yards of satin, made 800 pounds of maple sugar and cut all the wood for her family. She also raised six cows, 11 sheep and drove her own team of oxen to the mill and trading center 15 miles from home.[44] Dozens of other frontier wives were given credit for similar accomplishments.

The busy day of one hard-working housewife was described by the Enquirer:

> There is a woman in town that washed a whole week's washing and hung the clothes out to dry, cooked three meals, made a pair of pants for her youngest boy, darned her husband's socks, had the cholera and cured herself and then dyed--four dresses in one day.[45]

Highly praised was the frontier women who could manage with next to nothing. The Standard reprinted an article from the Cincinnati Atlas about a poor woman with seven children who was "out of money, out of bread and out of everything to eat." The resourceful women had nothing but some hens that produced a total

of eight eggs a day. The woman exchanged them for supplies to barely support her family. She was congratulated for her intelligence and thriftiness.[46]

Sochen said that many travelers to the middle western frontier in the first half of the nineteenth-century commented on the hard-working women and the lazy men.[47] One article that addresses this point appeared in the Statesman. In this piece, a man told what he liked in a woman. He said, "I like to see a young woman out in the morning scraping up chips to build a fire, and her husband in bed, it shows that she thinks more of him than she does of herself."[48]

Many women paid dearly for their dedication to hard work. Women aged noticeably on the frontier after constant childbearing, maintaining the home, caring for children, and working in the fields. In addition to their physical hardships, many frontier wives were very lonely. Religious camp meetings, quilting parties and the frolics held when a farm task had been completed were their only social activities. Even these social events meant more work as the frontier wife was required to entertain, provide the refreshments, and clean up after the evening was over.[49]

The frontier wife had to work for even the simplest of needs. She had to dry fruit, make candles, and even make caskets for dead babies.[50] If a woman wanted a dress, she was expected to make her own. On March 20, 1850, the Statesman told frontier wives how to make simple, elegant dresses.[51]

Despite the evidence of how hard a frontier wife's life was, at least one writer in 1849 thought that women had several advantages over men. He said a woman could "take a snooze after dinner, while her husband has got to work, run into debt until the husband warns the public by advertisement not to trust her on his account, and a woman can dress herself in neat and tidy calicoes for a dollar which her husband has to earn and fork over."[52]

Throughout all the articles about women in the frontier press the one recurring subject was the responsibility of motherhood. The Statesman described the mother as an "angel, guardian and guide."[53] The Standard said that a good mother never spoke to her children with a loud voice or in harsh, unkind tones.[54] She also never showed fear before her children.[55] Articles about temperance often condemned mothers who neglected their children because they drank.[56]

The relationship between the frontier mother and her children was often explored in the press. The ideal mother was expected to even sacrifice her own life to save her children. In "A Mother's Love," a fictional story in the Standard, a family was overcome by a snowstorm while sleighing in Vermont. The heroine of the story wrapped her own clothes around her shivering baby and although she perished her sacrifice allowed her child to be saved.[57]

Many mothers who did lose their children submitted poetry to the frontier press expressing their grief. An example of the many poems found in the three newspapers studied is "The

Mother to her First Born."

> Months have fled, my darling baby
> Since thy lovely form I gave
> With calm look, but bursting bosom
> To the cold and lovely grave.
> Months have fled, and those around me
> Deem the stricken heart is healed,
> They little know the depth of anguish
> Hid within the fountain sealed.[58]

III. Role of Women in Literature

Much of the fiction of this time was written by women for women. The fiction of popular writers was frequently not of a high literary quality and it did not endure, but it confirmed the moral values of the culture. Christian virtues were upheld, sin was punished and virtue was rewarded. Fiction followed a general pattern. Most often a beautiful heroine, yearning and long suffering, was consumed by strong emotions and inner conflicts. She was usually punished for any sexual indescretion she committed.[59]

Many of the articles that appeared in the Enquirer, the Standard and the Statesman had plots similar to this description. Susan Morris, the main character in the "Mechanic's Wife," led a tragic life because she was married to a selfish man who pursued his own selfish interests. Because Philip Morris neglected his wife, she died, worn out from the hard life she had to endure.[60] In "Was it Providence?" several female characters died because they disobeyed both physical and moral values.[61]

A frequent theme in the literature about women was the choosing of a husband. Most fictional women characters were instructed to marry the man they truly loved, regardless of his station in

life. Occasionally, this choice was a tragic one for the woman. In "Minnie Clifton, A Heart History," the main character led a dull and dreary life waiting for Hubert Woodley, the man she truly loved, to marry her. Hubert left town to marry another while Minnie cared for his aged father.[62] But in "Pauline," a French girl had to choose between a rich suitor, Alexis Laparout, and the poor man that she truly loved, Jean Provost. Although Pauline chose Jean, they lived a happy and prosperous life.[63] Equally happy was Clara Walton, who married Charles Forester, although he had almost nothing financially to offer. "Clara Walton," was a reprint from Godey's Lady's Book that appeared in the Statesman.[64]

Much of the fictional material that appeared in the frontier press was reprinted from Godey's Lady's Book. The Standard was highly complimentary of Godey's on two occasions. In December 1849, the Standard said that Godey's was ahead of any periodical of its kind with 32 impressive engravings.[65] Almost two months later, the Standard said that the "February issue of this year surpasses past issues in beauty of embellishments and richness of literature."[66] By 1860, the popular Godey's Lady's Book had 150,000 subscribers.[67]

The role of hard-working pioneer wife was explored in "Jane and John of Farmersville," a short story reprinted from the Genessee Farmer in the Statesman. The story said that John had the prettiest wife and Jane had the best husband. Together they had the best farm, the neatest garden, the prettiest cottage, and the prettiest children in all Farmersville. Much of the credit went to Jane for

the fine meals she prepared and the long hours she toiled in the family garden. Author James Mapleton saw Jane as the ideal pioneer wife: ready, willing and able to complete any task for her family. This story demonstrates how much of the fiction in the frontier press reinforced the view that woman should be hard-working individuals.[68]

In both poetry and short stories, women were depicted as brave individuals that were willing to give their lives to help build a nation. The Enquirer reprinted a poem from the New York Evening Post that followed this theme. It was entitled "The Pilgrim Mothers."

> ...Oh! Pilgrim Mothers! though ye lie
> Perchance in graves unknown,
> A memory that cannot die
> Hath claimed ye for its own;
>
> A sacredness to that bleak shore
> Your dust shall aye impart
> Your requiem--the ocean's roar
> Your shrine--a nation's heart...[69]

Two short stories, "The Matron's Defence" and "Polly Dust's Long Fight with the Commanches," depicted women in actual battle situations. "The Matron's Defence" told of how three Kentucky women defended themselves against a group of Wyandot Indians after their men folk had been killed. In a fierce battle, the three heroines exacted their revenge against the "swarthy warriors." By the end of the day, Miriam, Hope, and Alice had shot, axed, and knived 11 Indians.[70]

Equally brave was Polly Dust, a widow struggling for survival in Texas. Arriving home to find that Indians have slain

her infant daughter and kidnapped another child, Polly prepares to fight the Indians when they return to burn her cabin. An expert shot with a rifle, Polly successfully defends herself against the Indians. Thanks to Polly's courage and cool manner during a crisis, her daughter is rescued and her land is saved from the Indians.[71]

Whether it was Polly Dust, Minnie Clifton or Jane of Farmersville, the literature of this time depicted women as brave, hard-working individuals who were totally devoted to their families and their country.

IV. Famous Women

Although the frontier press was usually concerned with the merits of political candidates and new legislative measures, it did occasionally report on the lives of famous women. In between the numerous speeches by President Zachary Taylor, Henry Clay, Lewis Cass, and John Calhoun, the frontier press provided at least some filler material about such notables as Jenny Lind, Dolley Madison and Queen Victoria.

Jenny Lind was perhaps the most frequently mentioned woman in the Michigan frontier press from 1849-1850. The "Swedish Nightingale" made her long-awaited United States debut in 1850 under the direction of showman Phineas T. Barnum.[72]

Barnum gave her debut a tremendous promotional buildup. There was evidence of this in the frontier press. Over a period of three months, news items were run with regularity about the

singer. In March 1850, a letter was printed from Barnum in the Enquirer. Barnum said that "a visit from such a woman...will prove a blessing to America." The showman went on to say that Lind had turned down an offer to appear before Queen Victoria.[73] By April, 1850, the Enquirer had obtained a list of when and where her concerts wer scheduled.[74] The Standard ran an article in June that also gave her concert schedule.[75] In July 1850, the Standard had a front page article that gave her life story. This article appeared less than eight weeks before debut in New York City.[76]

The frontier press also took note of the death and funeral of Dolley Madison, the former First Lady. The Statesman said that "Mrs. Madison...was an American Jewel. She has occupied through life, with eminent and equal proprity and dignity, an humble and exalted position."[77] The Standard also mentioned her funeral.[78]

Queen Victoria was evaluated as a mother in an issue of the Standard. Victoria, the mother of seven children, was said to be trying to produce a dozen aspirants for the throne. "England never produced a sovereign who promises to do more for the country than little Victoria," said the Standard.[79]

Several other women also merited some comment in the press. Dorothea Dix, the social reformer who dedicated her life to helping the mentally ill, was praised by the Statesman as "The Crazy Angel who wakes up the minds of the public in behalf of the insane." In a article reprinted from the Detroit Tribune, the Statesman also

described Dix's visit to Michigan nine years earlier.[80] Elizabeth Blackwell, the first woman to receive the M.D. degree in the United States, also made the news. Dr. Blackwell was in Paris and the Standard said she bewildered the faculty with her diploma authorizing her to "dose and bleed and amputate with the best of them.[81]

Although coverage of famous women was sparse in the frontier press, what did appear was usually favorable. Women like Jenny Lind, Dorothea Dix and Dolley Madison were complimented both for their talents and characters.

V. Women's Rights

As late as 1850, a wife had no legal control over her own property; all her belongings were legally in the hands of her husband. Her services belonged to him, and she had no legal rights, even to the custody of her own children.[82] Women still could not sit on juries. Professional schools would not accept women. Those who studied law could not take bar examinations in any state.[83]

On the frontier, women were at a premium. In order to attract women to the frontier, some Western territories granted wives the right to hold their land separately from their husbands. In the mid-1850s, single women in Oregon were given 320 acres if they would emigrate there.[84] The California constitution of 1849 recognized the right of married women to keep property they held before marriage separate from that of their husbands.[85]

An important milestone for women's rights came on July 13, 1848, when Elizabeth Cady Stanton called together several hundred women in Seneca Falls, New York. This is usually credited as the first women's rights meeting in the United States. Stanton and

others composed the Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions which said women were equal to men.[86]

Many male commentators ignored Seneca Falls or mocked it. One journalist described the women in attendance as "divorced wives, childless women, and some old maids.[87]

Although there was no mention of Seneca Falls in the Standard, the Enquirer and the Statesman from 1849-1850, the three newspapers did make some favorable comments about women's rights.

In 1850, Ohio women held four separate conventions to try to influence a state constitutional convention taking place at that time.[88] The Statesman reported one meeting in Salem, Ohio, where 500 delegates came to "obtain an equal participation in the social, pecuniary, and religious responsibilities." The delegates were hoping for a provision in the state constitution of Ohio that would give females the right of suffrage. Letters were read from Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. The Statesman supported the women saying that Ohio had a "disgraceful and disorderly legislature." The Statesman added:

> The right of suffrage, once extended to females, would place political power in the hands of those who would consign to oblivion the unprincipled politicians...of Ohio...

The Statesman invited the suffrage movement to come to Michigan as well.[89]

The Standard printed the thoughts of one women's rights supporter who identified herself as "C." The anonymous "C" said:

> "I wish my sex would arise in her strength and cast off that hallucination of asserted inferiority with which man art constantly coupling to the name of woman."[90]

The Enquirer and the Standard both used stories about women who demanded higher wages for their jobs. The Enquirer told about a group of women in Fairhaven, Connecticut, who struck for higher wages for opening oysters.[91] The Standard praised a group of seamstresses in Adrian, Michigan, who banded together to not work for prices lower that what they signed on for. Condemning the "niggardly" compensation they received for their industry, the Standard said, "Girls, remember the motto of Davy Crockett--be sure you are right, then go ahead."[92]

The frontier press supported both suffrage and better wages for women. Although there were no editorials supporting the suffrage movement, a favorable attitude was reflected in the news stories and letters to the editor that appeared in the frontier press.

VI. Humor Directed at Women

Although the frontier press praised the idea of women's rights they were not above directing humor at women. Most often, women were criticized for their type of dress or they were accused of talking too much. A Mrs. Fanny Butler was criticized in the Standard for wearing "men's clothing." The article said that pantaloons were ugly and ungraceful articles of dress. The Standard recommended that Mrs. Butler be "court martialed and deprived of a woman's commission."[93]

Talkative women were the frequent butt of jokes. The Enquirer said "woman...needs no eulogy, she speaks for herself.[94] It also provided a joke from a minister:

> Be not proud that our blessed Lord paid your sex the distinguished honor of appearing first to a female after the resurection, for it was only done that the glad tidings might spread the sooner.[95]

The Statesman took a similar approach:

> It is said that a girl in Pitsfield Massachusetts was struck dumb by the firing of a cannon. Since then it is said that a number of married men have invited the artillery companies to come and discharge their pieces on their premises.[96]

Humor was frequently provided by Mrs. Partington, a fictional character who appeared more than ten times in the Enqurier, the Standard and the Statesman in 1849-1850.

Mrs. Partington was created by humorist Benjamin Penhallow Shillaber in 1847.[97] Much of Mrs. Partington's humor is inherit in her language, which was meant to represent a lower-class New England dialect and to typify the speech of the American "democrat" of the mid-nineteenth century. Her speech was often distinguished by regional expressions, jumbled syntax and unconventional grammar.[98]

A typical conversation with Mrs. Partington appeared in the Statesman in April, 1850:

> For my part, I can't deceive what on airth eddication is coming' to. When I was young, if a gal only understood the rules of distraction, provision, multiplying, replenishing, and the common denominators, and knew all about the rivers and their obituaries, and covenants, and dormitories, the providence and umpires, they had eddication enough.[99]

Characters like Mrs. Partington and others reflect the abundance of humor directed at women in the frontier press. Most of the time it was aimed at the beliefs of what women should say and what they should wear.

PROFILE OF THE FRONTIER WOMAN

The Grand Rapids Enquirer, the Marshall Statesman, and the Hillsdale Whig Standard are representative of the frontier newspapers printed in Michigan during the 1840s and 1850s. All three newspapers are revealing records of what information was provided to the people on the Michigan frontier. After examining the three newspapers, several conclusions can be made about how the Michigan frontier press depicted women.

The women's role in courtship and marriage was extremely well covered in the frontier press. Both men and women were warned frequently about choosing mates. Dozens of articles and stories provided advice about finding the proper wife or husband.

Women were depicted in the frontier press as hard-working wives and mothers. Frequently, examples were given in each of the three newspapers studied about ordinary housewives who had achieved some feat in either cooking or sewing. The frontier press also helped housewives by providing them with household hints.

The literature in the frontier press explored the women's role in courtship and marriage. The fiction used in the frontier newspaper confirmed the values of the culture. Women who did not meet their duties were criticized. The heroine in the frontier literature would sacrifice everything for her country and family. Fictional characters like Polly Dust depicted frontier women as intelligent and brave.

Famous women did merit some coverage in the press but only a fraction of what notable men were given. Yet, there were some

short articles about famous women such as Jenny Lind and Queen Victoria.

Women's rights were not ignored or ridiculed in the three newspapers studied. In fact, high praise was given to those seeking to extend women's rights. Coverage was given to the suffrage effort in Ohio and to women who demanded higher wages on the job.

Most of the humor directed at women in the frontier press concerned their dress or ridiculed their talkative nature. One character, Mrs. Partington, was a frequent visitor to the pages of the frontier press.

Finally, no significant difference could be found between the papers, even though one was Democratic and the other two were Whig. All three donated space to similar topics and many times the same articles would appear in all three newspapers.

This paper was written to help give a general background of the frontier press. Exhaustive studies could be written on each topic covered in this paper. That is why each topic was touched on in a general fashion, giving an overall view of women in the frontier press.

Perhaps the best reason for studying the frontier press was was explained in the Standard when a correspondent from a British newspaper wrote:

> When I review my past life,...How interesting would it be now...to look into the papers read when I was 12 years old. How many events, feelings, and associations would come to mind.[100]

The correspondent summarized it well when he said that newspapers "preserve and assist the memory." By studying the frontier press we can explored the memory of the women in frontier America that emerges through its pages.

NOTES

[1]John Cumming, "History of Michigan Newspapers," Family Trails 3 (Fall-Winter 1971-1972):1.

[2]The Seventh Census of the United States: 1850 (Washington: Robert Armstrong, 1853), p. 898.

[3]Thomas D. Clark, Frontier America (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), p. 306.

[4]Beth Williams, "The Woman Pioneer of the Eighteen Forties," Michigan History 26 (1942):215.

[5]Willis F. Dunbar, "Frontiersmanship in Michigan," Michigan History 50 (June 1966):100.

[6]Clark, Frontier America, p. 306.

[7]Fred B. Kniffen, "Milestones and Stumbling Blocks," Pioneer America 7 (January 1975):36.

[8]Mary R. Beard, America Through Women's Eyes (New York: Macmillan Company, 1933), p. 90.

[9]Kniffen, "Milestones," p. 4.

[10]Ibid.

[11]William Chauncey Langdon, Everyday Things in American Life, 1776-1876 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941), p. 155.

[12]The Seventh Census of the United States: 1850 (Washington: Robert Armstrong, 1853), p. 898.

[13]Dwight Goss, History of Grand Rapids and its Industries (Chicago: C.F. Cooper and Co., 1906), p. 900.

[14]Ibid., p. 179.

[15]Ibid., p. 725.

[16]Grand Rapids Enquirer, 24 April 1850, p. 2.

[17]Goss, History of Grand Rapids, p. 838.

[18]Washington Gardner, The History of Calhoun County (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Co., 1913), p. 270.

[19]John Cumming, The Gold Rush (Mt. Pleasant, Michigan: By the Author, 465 Hiawatha Drive, 1974), p. iii.

[20]It cannot be determined if James Pratt and George Pratt were related to each other. The Statesman never states that they were members of the same family. Marshall Statesman, 13 February 1850, p. 2.

[21]Ibid.

[22]Hillsdale Whig Standard, 30 June 1846, pp. 1-2.

[23]Edwin Emery, The Press and America, 4th ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1978), p. 98.

[24]Marshall Statesman, 26 September 1849, p. 1.

[25]Marshall Statesman, 3 October 1849, p. 4.

[26]Grand Rapids Enquirer, 17 October 1849, p. 1.

[27]Marshall Statesman, 27 February 1850, p. 1.

[28]Hillsdale Whig Standard, 28 May 1850, p. 1.

[29]Marshall Statesman, 14 November 1849, p. 1.

[30]Marshall Statesman, 5 June 1850, p. 1.

[31]Hillsdale Whig Standard, 4 September 1849, p. 2.

[32]Grand Rapids Enquirer, 26 December 1849, p. 1.

[33]Hillsdale Whig Standard, 11 December 1849, p. 1.

[34]Hillsdale Whig Standard, 9 October 1849, p. 1.

[35]Hillsdale Whig Standard, 10 July 1849, p. 1.

[36]Hillsdale Whig Standard, 19 March 1850, p. 1.

[37]Marshall Statesman, 27 February 1850, p. 1.

[38]Marshall Statesman, 26 September 1849, p. 1.

[39]Marshall Statesman, 16 January 1850, p. 1.

[40]Hillsdale Whig Standard, 11 September 1849, p. 1.

[41]June Sochen, Herstory (New York: Alfred Publishing Co., Inc., 1974), p. 114.

[42]Kniffen, "Milestones," p. 4.

[43]Grand Rapids Enquirer, 24 October 1849, p. 1.

[44]Hillsdale Whig Standard, 21 May 1850, p. 1.

[45]Grand Rapids Enquirer, 26 September 1849, p. 1.

[46]Hillsdale Whig Standard, 4 June 1850, p. 1.

[47]Sochen, Herstory, p. 112.

[48]Marshall Statesman, 18 July 1849, p. 2.

[49]Sochen, Herstory, pp. 112-114.

[50]Mary R. Beard, America Through Women's Eyes, (New York: MacMillan Company, 1933), pp. 95-100.

[51]Marshall Statesman, 20 March 1850, p. 4.

[52]Grand Rapids Enquirer, 7 November 1849, p. 1.

[53]Marshall Statesman, 10 April 1850, p. 1.

[54]Hillsdale Whig Standard, 12 February 1850, p. 1.

[55]Hillsdale Whig Standard, 6 November 1849, p. 2.

[56]Marshall Statesman, 20 February 1850, p. 1.

[57]Hillsdale Whig Standard, 18 December 1849, p. 1.

[58]Hillsdale Whig Standard, 9 April 1850, p. 1.

[59]Sochen, Herstory, pp. 142-143.

[60]Grand Rapids Enquirer, 17 July 1850, p. 1.

[61]Grand Rapids Enquirer, 10 April 1850, p. 1.

[62]Hillsdale Whig Standard, 9 October 1849, p. 1.

[63]Hillsdale Whig Standard, 16 October 1849, p. 1.

[64]Marshall Statesman, 3 October 1849, p. 1.

[65]Hillsdale Whig Standard, 11 December 1849, p. 2.

[66]Hillsdale Whig Standard, 29 January 1850, p. 2.

[67]Sochen, Herstory, p. 119.

[68]Marshall Statesman, 20 February 1850, p. 1.

[69]Grand Rapids Enquirer, 31 October 1849, p. 1.

[70]Hillsdale Whig Standard, 13 November 1849, p. 1.

[71]Grand Rapids Enquirer, 8 May 1850, p. 1.

[72]Encyclopedia Britannica, 1979 ed., s.v. "Lind, Jenny."

[73]Grand Rapids Enquirer, 13 March 1850, p. 2.

[74]Grand Rapids Enquirer, 10 April 1850, p. 1.

[75]Hillsdale Whig Standard, 18 June 1850, p. 1.

[76]Hillsdale Whig Standard, 24 July 1850, p. 1.

[77]Marshall Statesman, 23 July 1849, p. 2.

[78]Hillsdale Whig Standard, 31 July 1849, p. 1.

[79]Hillsdale Whig Standard, 25 June 1850, p. 1.

[80]Marshall Statesman, 27 March 1850, p. 1.

[81]Hillsdale Whig Standard, 7 August 1849, p. 1.

[82]Sandra Stencel, "The Changing American Family," Editorial Research Reports (June 3, 1977):13.

[83]Sochen, Herstory, p. 134.

[84]Ibid., p. 114.

[85]Thomas Woody, A History of Women's Education in the United States (New York: The Science Press, 1929; reprinted., New York: Octagon Books, 1974), p. 398.

[86]Sochen, Herstory, p. 125.

[87]Ibid., p. 127.

[88]Judith Papachristou, Women Together (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1976), p. 32.

[89]Marshall Statesman, 15 May 1850, p. 2.

[90]Hillsdale Whig Standard, 25 December 1849, p. 1.

[91]Grand Rapids Enquirer, 21 November 1849, p. 2.

[92]Hillsdale Whig Standard, 23 July 1850, p. 2.

[93]Hillsdale Whig Standard, 23 October 1849, p. 1.

[94]Grand Rapids Enquirer, 29 August 1849, p. 1.

[95]Grand Rapids Enquirer, 13 November 1849, p. 2.

[96]Marshall Statesman, 13 February 1850, p. 1.

[97]John Q. Reed, Benjamin Penhallow Shillaber (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1972), p. 33.

[98]Ibid., p. 38.

[99]Marshall Statesman, 30 April 1850, p. 2.

[100]Hillsdale Whig Standard, 23 October 1849, p. 1.